

Kansas Makes Significant Improvements in Bioterrorism

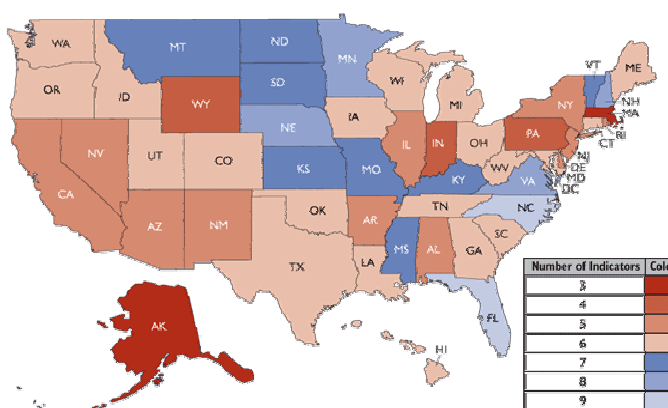
Kansas is significantly more prepared for a terrorist attack this year than ever before, according to a report released today from Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a national non-profit, non-partisan organization.

The 68-page report "Ready or Not – Protecting the Public's Health in Age of Bioterrorism, 2004" tracks the progress states have made to respond to potential terrorist attacks. The report points out the strengths of each state's bioterrorism program along with areas needing additional funding and attention.

Kansas Ranks Higher:

Only six states scored higher than Kansas, putting the state toward the top in the country for achieving the standards set. Kansas is one of eight states to meet 7 out of 10 standards. This is a considerable improvement over last year's score of 3.

The report identifies 10 key indicators in the three categories of "Funding," "Back to Basics" and "All-Hazards." The indicators serve as performance benchmarks for state bioterrorism programs throughout the United States. One point was awarded for each indicator that a state met.



"Kansas is much more prepared for a bioterrorism attack today than we were a year ago, and considerably more prepared for terrorism or natural disasters than we were prior to 9-11," stated KDHE Secretary Roderick Bremby. "The report recognizes the significant strides our state has made to increase state and local preparedness."

"The continued federal funding for this ongoing preparedness effort has allowed Kansas to develop infrastructure and continue to build upon it, as well as to develop new working partnerships with local officials and health experts throughout this state," said KDHE Interim Health Director Richard Morrissey.

Significant Strides Made: Kansas was strong and/or has made noteworthy improvements in these seven indicators:

1. Spent or obligated at least 90 percent of FY 2003 federal funds: Kansas successfully spent all of its federally allocated bioterrorism preparedness funds, making it one of 29 states that met this indicator.

-Continued-

2. Local concurrence with state's bioterrorism preparedness plan: Staff members with the Kansas Bioterrorism Program perform assistance visits and work directly with local health departments so that plans are consistent with CDC requirements. In addition, a position was recently filled in order to assist in serving the needs of rural jurisdictions. The program is now developing standardized documents to assist health agencies with planning.

3. Has sufficient Bio-Safety Level 3 (BSL-3) Laboratories : Kansas was recognized as one of 16 states that have at least one laboratory equipped to handle critical biological agents and perform confirmatory testing. In addition, KDHE has developed formal agreements with 40 sentinel labs.

4. Has a disease tracking system in day-to-day use where information can be monitored via the Internet: In Kansas, 42 local health departments participate in HAWK, an electronic disease reporting and tracking system. There are more than 150 individuals who are HAWK users. Kansas' system has been in place since 1999.

5. Has legal authority to quarantine: Kansas has had statutory authority allowing the Secretary of KDHE and local health officers to implement quarantines for many years. In addition, proposed legislation would streamline and strengthen that authority.

6. Increased flu vaccination rates in adults 65 and over from 2002-2003: TFAH uses this indicator to measure the extent to which bioterrorism preparedness efforts had increased the state's overall preparedness for naturally occurring disease outbreaks and natural disasters. Flu vaccination rates increased in Kansas, according to the report.

7. Has pandemic flu plan : Kansas has drafted a plan for responding to a flu pandemic and has submitted it to CDC. A pandemic is an epidemic over a large region, and each state is expected to develop a plan to address the potential for such an event, as Kansas has.

"It is particularly gratifying that Kansas more than doubled its score from last year's report," said Mindee Reece, director of the Kansas Bioterrorism Program. "The working relationships we have established with our state and local partners contributed to our improved rating and will assist us in continued improvements as we strive together to make Kansas a safer place to live."

Areas for improvement: Kansas seeks to improve in the following areas:

1. State spending on public health was increased or was maintained : Like many other states, Kansas has reduced state spending to make up budget shortfalls over the past several years, but no federal bioterrorism funds have been used in place of state funds. Also like many states, federal bioterrorism funding fell slightly over the past year.

-Continued-

2. Has less than 25 percent of public health workforce eligible to retire within five years : There is a national shortage of health workers. However, through efforts such as the Workforce and Leadership Development Center, the Kansas Public Health Leadership Institute and other continuing education programs, Kansas continues to recruit and build the level of professionalism within its public health workforce.

3. Has enough lab scientists to test for anthrax and plague: KDHE has increased the number of laboratory personnel who have received specialized training in handling biological agents since last year. Surge capacity has also been increased because the training has been provided to personnel at the Kansas State University BSL-3 lab.

An executive summary and the full report may be viewed on the Internet at:
<http://healthyamericans.org/reports/bioterror04>